

Abstract

Original Article

An Exploratory Study of Empathy in Resident Physicians at an Urban Medical Center

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Abstract

Background: It has been well documented that a physician's empathy diminishes throughout medical school as well as residency. Past studies report that being able to communicate throughout the care of one's patient leads to fewer malpractice claims. Research shows that physician empathy leads to better outcomes and greater patient safety.

Objectives: The aim of this study was assess what factors affect with resident empathy. Over two years, residents at our institution were distributed the Jefferson Scale of Empathy as well as the pre-survey questionnaire.

Methods: Over a two year period, surveys were completed by resident physicians at a single urban teaching university. Empathy was measured using the Jefferson Scale of Empathy and correlation was assessed to 15 different characteristics.

Results: The results from the survey collection were 172 responses out of 477 total residents (response rate of 36%). The largest response came from Internal Medicine at 62 responses. Male residents were found to have higher empathy scores than their female counterparts ($p < 0.001$). Our analysis shows that residents with time off prior to medical school ($p = 0.009$) and residents without children ($p = 0.009$) were found to higher empathy scores than their counterparts. Furthermore our analysis illustrates that there is no significant difference between surgical residents and non-surgical residents empathy score ($p = 0.055$).

Conclusions: Our study is the first paper to demonstrate higher empathy score in male resident physicians than their female counterparts. The hope is that if the data in this study is substantiated, with further investigation, our understanding of physician-patient dynamics maybe impacted.

Keywords: empathy, Jefferson scale of Empathy, resident physicians